

## Response to the Conservative's Groups response to the Boundary Committees Draft Recommendations for the Tring and District area.

Prepared by Cllrs Mrs Rance and Cllr Harris.

We note the Conservative Group has selected certain quotations from the Boundary Committee's Draft Recommendations relating to the Borough wards of the Tring and District area. In order add perspective to these quotations, and to assist members in coming to an informed decision, we believe it is necessary to provide the full text from their document.

**PARAGRAPHS 113 to 118 OF THE BOUNDARY COMMITTEE'S DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS (2005)**

**113** The Liberal Democrats proposed to combine part of Tring East and Aldbury & Wigginton wards to create a two-member Tring East, Aldbury & Wigginton ward. It considered that this proposal 'seeks to satisfy the need to provide equality of representation whilst maintaining the sincere communities of Aldbury village and Wigginton village'. It considered that this proposal was justified because 'the parish boundaries of both Aldbury and Wigginton are currently intertwined with Tring East' it continued, 'Tring station falls within Aldbury parish, children from Aldbury and Wigginton generally attend Tring School.' It also noted that Tring East ward already houses the 'rural area of Hastoe within its ward and [it] would not therefore be an unnatural marriage' and that 'Tring West ward is made up similarly to that which we propose [...] insofar as it has a large part of the town of Tring together with the two villages of Wilstone and Long Marston'.

**114** The Liberal Democrats also proposed further amendments to the existing Tring wards in order to improve electoral equality. It proposed to transfer a small area in the New Mill area from Tring East ward into Tring Central ward. It also proposed to transfer an area of Tring West ward into its proposed Tring East, Aldbury & Wigginton ward, those properties off the High Street between Akeman Street and Mansion Drive. It noted that this was returning to the boundary in this area prior to the last review carried out by the Local Government Commission for England. It also proposed to transfer Fantail Lane and part of Christchurch Road into Tring Central ward from Tring West ward. It considered that transferring areas between these wards was 'difficult' and that its proposals were the 'most acceptable.' It acknowledged that this 'breaches what is currently a natural boundary' and that it would also be satisfied if instead we 'considered it appropriate to have inequality of representation.' It proposed that the resulting Tring West ward be renamed Tring west & Rural. Tring Town Council submitted identical proposals to the Liberal Democrats.

**115** Aldbury Parish Council opposed the proposal to combine Tring East and Aldbury & Wigginton wards. It considered that the 'rural parishes of Aldbury and Wigginton are very different [in] character from the urban area of Tring East.' It also noted that this was the decision taken in the last review. Councillor Jameson was also of this opinion. He considered that its 'rural character entitled it to separate representation.' He also opposed all the proposals made by the Liberal Democrats saying that changes would 'confuse voters.' He also sent a petition with 172 signatures all in opposition to the proposals to combine Tring East and Aldbury & Wigginton wards. This was signed by residents from Tring East, Aldbury and Wigginton. Mr Standen, a local resident also opposed the Liberal Democrats' proposal, and considered that a 'merger would be a retrograde step.' He also noted that Aldbury and Wigginton are 'distinct rural communities with their own amenities and sense of identity.' Mr Harris, also a local resident, considered that the two wards should be combined so that both areas can 'have a bigger voice at Dacorum Borough Council.'

**116** We have carefully considered all the submissions we received in relation to the three Tring and Aldbury & Wigginton wards. We note the opposition to the Liberal Democrats' and Tring Town Council's proposal for the area, in particular the opposition to combining Tring East and Aldbury & Wigginton wards. We also note Councillor Jameson's petition regarding this union. However, it is **quality of argument** rather than quantity of submissions that we are concerned with, and despite this opposition we do not feel that the reasons given as to why these areas should not be combined have been fully justified. We note the argument put forward that the Local Government Commission for England did not combine these wards in the last review of Dacorum, however, whilst we are mindful of decisions made previously we cannot assume that what was the case eight years ago is still the case now without a full argument. We require evidence as to why these two areas cannot be combined and why an electoral variance of 12% by 2009 (Aldbury & Wigginton ward) is justified. We consider that the argument put forward by the Liberal Democrats gives better reasoning as to why combining these areas would not detract from the identity of either area. Given the similar nature of the existing Tring West ward and also that a large part of Tring East ward is already rural in nature, we do not consider this is a totally inappropriate union. However, we would welcome comments on this during Stage Three.

**117** We note Councillor Jameson's opposition to the Fantail Road amendment between Tring West and Tring Central wards, and also to the amendment between Tring East and West wards, however we do not consider the argument we have at this stage against such moves outweighs the better level of electoral equality achieved by transferring these electors.

**118** We are therefore proposing to adopt the Liberal Democrats' and Tring Town Council's proposals in full for this area. Our proposed Tring Central, Tring East, Aldbury & Wigginton and Tring West & Rural wards are expected to have electoral variances within 6% of the borough average by 2009. Tables 1 and 2 (on pages 9 and 12, respectively) provide details of the constituent parts and electoral variances of our draft recommendations for Tring Central, Tring East, Aldbury & Wigginton and Tring West & Rural wards. Our draft recommendations are shown on Map 1 and Map 4 accompanying this report.

**Summary of the draft recommendations**

	Ward name	No. of councillors	Electorate (2009)	No. of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
20	Tring Central	2	3974	1987	-6
21	Tring East, Aldbury & Wigginton	2	4027	2014	-4
22	Tring West & Rural	2	3979	1990	-5

**Summary of the existing wards with a council size reduced from 52 to 51 councillors**

	Ward name	No. of Councillors	Electorate (2009)	No. of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
3	Aldbury & Wigginton	1	1847	1847	-12
22	Tring Central	2	3870	1935	-8
23	Tring East	1	2063	2063	-2
24	Tring West	2	4200	2100	-0

**We make the following submission in response to the arguments put forward by the Tring Town Council Conservative Group:**

**Tring East Aldbury &Wigginton (TEAW)**

**Paragraph 3**

We accept that the current guidance does not weight the criteria by which boundaries are to be set. However 'equality of representation' is clearly a significant consideration as this is the only criterion that prompts a Review by the Commission outside of the normal cycle.

The quotation:

*“The current view of the Commission is correct insofar as there has to be an element of reconciliation between the criteria”*

is taken from the Borough Council's response to the Review (a point not made clear in the Conservative Group's response) and was not a view supported by this Council.

**Paragraph 4**

This Review has been imposed as a result of current and projected inequalities of representation within certain Borough Council wards. Only in consideration of very special circumstances will they allow a variance of over 10%. Clearly, from the statistics provided in the Conservative Group's report, the variance is increasing year on year and for this reason, and those stated in our original submission, we do not believe that special circumstances exist to warrant such a variation on this occasion.

**Paragraph 5**

Clearly it is impossible to provide an exact forecast of electorate for any future period of time and indeed the forecast provided for Aldbury and Wigginton in the Review of 1998 is a good example of how inaccurate a forecast can be (see paragraph 5 of the Conservative Group's report). However the Borough Council, who are responsible for providing the forecast, can only use their best endeavours to provide these statistics. The criteria for calculating the electorate has to be checked and approved by the Commission prior to being utilised.

### **Paragraph 6**

It is inevitable that planning applications will be submitted for additional housing across the Borough during and after a Boundary Review. However, there has to be a point in time when head-counting stops, otherwise a Review would never reach a conclusion.

### **Paragraph 7**

It is true that 8% of electors in the current Tring East are in the rural area of the ward, but it is also true that more than 75% of the landmass is in the rural area. A combined ward would have about 50% of the electorate in rural areas and 50% in the urban part of Tring. Therefore neither Town nor Country would be dominant.

### **Paragraph 8**

There are three areas where the boundaries of the current Tring East ward are “intertwined” with Aldbury & Wigginton Ward:

1. Chesham Road, Wigginton - five properties in Tring
2. Highfield Road, Wigginton - three properties in Tring
3. Pendley Farm, Aldbury Parish - the boundary runs through the middle of the farm buildings

### **Paragraph 9**

This paragraph makes reference to the ‘Guidance and Procedural Advice for Periodic Electoral Reviews’ and specifically to paragraph 3.35. To allow members to make a fully informed decision on this particular point we have reproduced this paragraph and those that immediately follow it:

#### **Rural/urban weightings**

**3.35** An issue that has raised some difficulty in the past is that of achieving equality of representation in local authorities that have one or more urban centres but also have large, more sparsely populated rural hinterlands. Some of these authorities have rural wards that are far larger in area than some whole districts in other parts of the country. Reflecting this, it is commonly the case that, prior to a PER, the electorates in the rural wards tend to be over-represented in arithmetical terms, while those in town wards tend to be under-represented. It has been highlighted in many cases put to the LGCE that this situation reflects the difficulty that councillors experience in adequately representing the interests of electors in rural wards, which often have poor transport links, and that provision should therefore be made for an element of over-representation in such areas.

**3.36** There has also been pressure to allow over-representation in urban areas which have particular social characteristics and problems. It has been argued that, in such areas, the representational workload of councillors is particularly high and that allowance for this should be made in a PER.

**3.37** There is **no provision in legislation** for the BCFE to apply such a weighting in reaching recommendations. Nevertheless, we accept that attempts simply to even out the numbers between urban and rural areas can result in increasing the size of already very large rural wards. This may not satisfy elements of the statutory criteria: it may undermine, rather than enhance the effectiveness and convenience (to electors) of local government; and it also might fail to recognise and have regard to the identities and interests of local communities.

Any proposal must be considered on its merits. The current transport links between the areas that make up the proposed TEAW ward have never been questioned other than the usual requests for better public transport facilities, a matter that will not change, or be influenced by, any outcome of this Review. Furthermore, we contend that the proposed increase in the geographical size of the ward is not so significant that it will ‘undermine the effectiveness and convenience (to electors) of local government’ or ‘fail to recognise and have regard to the identities and interests of local communities’ (paragraph 3.37 above).

### **Paragraph 10**

Many parts of the district of Tring are in an area of Outstanding Natural Beauty including Aldbury, Wigginton and parts of Tring East.

As stated in Paragraph 9 above, Public Transport links will neither improve nor decline as a result of this Review or indeed by any change to electoral ward boundaries. The road infrastructure and other transport links will be as adequate if the proposal is agreed, as it is today.

### **Paragraph 11**

This argument is an irrelevance. The Town Council is a consultee of this Review and is thus entitled to put forward any proposal affecting its area, and where such a proposal links an adjoining area it is clearly necessary and appropriate to include, and comment upon, that area as well.

### **Paragraph 12**

We revert to the argument in our original submission in that the proposed TEAW ward will have similar characteristics to the existing Tring West ward.

Furthermore it cannot be true to say that an amalgamation of Tring East and the two villages of Aldbury and Wigginton, for electoral purposes, will detract from the distinct communities that these areas enjoy. The harmonious relationship that is currently apparent between the villages of Aldbury and Wigginton, that combine to make the existing ward, is evidence that individual communities can co-exist within one electoral ward.

### **Boundaries between Tring Wards**

#### **Paragraphs 14 - 17**

- (a) Albany Terrace is currently in Tring East as the result of an error following the last Boundary Review. The official maps show that it should be in Tring Central. The same is true in reverse for New Mill Terrace. Both points are accepted by the relevant officers at Dacorum Borough Council. The proposal corrects these errors and further tidies up the boundary in this area.
- (b) The new boundary between TEAW and Tring West is a stronger boundary than at present and is similar to that which existed prior to the last Review (which the then Conservative Group sought to maintain). It utilises the High Street and Bank Alley as delineating features rather than the boundaries of Tesco and the Arts Education School.
- (c) The issue of Christchurch Road and Fantail Lane is answered in Paragraphs 117 of the Commissions Draft proposal, which we continue to support.

### **Proposal to Create a Town Council Ward of New Mill**

It is true that many years ago New Mill was separated from the main Town of Tring and was a community on its own. However, the boundary proposed by the Conservative Group bears little resemblance to the historic area of New Mill and leaves out all the major features which once made up this community, for example the New Mill Baptist Church, the Pub and New Mill Terrace.

The existing ward of Tring Central, which incorporates New Mill and Bulbourne, has existed satisfactorily for many years. Tring Central is divided into three polling districts of which the whole of New Mill and Bulbourne is one. The other two polling districts are also based around historic communities namely Silk Mill and Bunstrux.

The surveys to which the Conservative Group refer cannot be taken into consideration as they were ad hoc and without agreement or authority. We feel confident that other people could secure an alternative response using similar methods.

We believe this proposal has been made for party political reasons and with no consideration for the criteria as set down by the Commission.